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ABSTRACT

Disturbed by inequities created by tracking, many schools have attempted to "detrack" by consciously organizing students into academically heterogeneous classrooms. This paper, based on a year-long interpretive study of a detracked ninth grade English-History "core" program at a diverse urban high school, focuses on the encounter between the core teachers' progressive teaching practices in their detracked classrooms and the "unofficial" (Dyson, 1993) social worlds of the students who were enacting those practices. Highlighting small group work as a critical point of convergence and tension between these two classroom worlds, this paper describes how the racially and socioeconomically polarized nature of the overall school context framed and permeated students' interactions in the detracked class, leading, at times, to a reiteration of the very inequalities which detracking was designed to address. It considers the challenges of teaching for social justice in racially and socioeconomically divided settings, and offers suggestions for practice. (Contains 33 references, 8 notes, and 3 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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Running head: STUDENTS' SOCIAL WORLDS IN THE DETRACKED CLASSROOM

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Unpacking Detracking:

When Progressive Pedagogy Meets Students' Social Worlds

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Abstract

Disturbed by inequities created by tracking, many schools have attempted to "detrack" by consciously organizing students into academically heterogeneous classrooms. This manuscript, based on a year-long interpretive study of a detracked ninth grade English-History "core" program at a diverse urban high school, focuses on the encounter between the core teachers' progressive teaching practices in their detracked classrooms and the "unofficial" (Dyson, 1993) social worlds of the students who were enacting those practices. Highlighting small group work as a critical point of convergence and tension between these two classroom worlds, I describe how the racially and socioeconomically polarized nature of the overall school context framed and permeated students' interactions in the detracked class, leading, at times, to a reiteration of the very inequalities which detracking was designed to address. The manuscript considers the challenges of teaching for social justice in racially and socioeconomically divided settings, and offer suggestions for practice.

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Unpacking Detracking:

When Progressive Pedagogy Meets Students' Social Worlds

> So generally when I'm putting groups together I'm trying to balance them in a number of different ways by gender and ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds and personality type… I think…having the white, upper and middle class kids appreciate the life experiences of the students of color in the class and the way in which those life experiences – those different life experiences – give those kids something to contribute and are something that the white kids in the class can learn from [is important].
>
> - Mr. James,[1] history teacher in detracked 9th grade core[2]

> I would actually probably choose [to work with in a small group]--I'm going say my friends. Not just because--not just so I could talk to them or whatever. Only because in other experiences I've had...I don't exactly remember...Oh. I don't want to say their names but we sat in a group quiz and they treated me like I was ignorant and when we were reading the questions and I got it right away, they looked at me like "Oh. How do you know that?" I'm like "I read the book." They didn't respect me, and my friends do, and they [my friends] know I'm intelligent.
>
> - Kiana, a high achieving African American student in Mr. James' history class

In his detracked history class at an integrated urban high school, Mr. James hoped that by creating carefully balanced cooperative groups he could provide opportunities for his students to learn from each other and to broaden their knowledge of the world. He hoped, in particular, that his more privileged, European American students would learn about the "life experiences" of their peers of color. Kiana's

experiences of group-work, however, reflected the lived reality of a student of color working in an intentionally "balanced" group. When placed with students who were not her friends – European American students, in the racially polarized social context of this particular school – she felt she was treated as "ignorant." Rejecting the carefully balanced groups constructed by her teachers, Kiana preferred instead to work with her friends, whom she felt respected her.

As Mr. James' and Kiana's comments suggest, "official" and "unofficial" worlds co-exist within school classrooms (Dyson, 1993). In the detracked English and History core classrooms where Kiana and her peers mingled, the official world was framed by the progressive pedagogy of Mr. Apple and Mr. James, two teachers committed to using detracking as a means for rectifying Cedar High School's long-standing and racially defined educational inequalities. The unofficial world of the detracked English-History core hinted at by Kiana was dense with social relationships and situated within the broader school context as well as the community beyond. Race, class, and gender were part of both of these classroom worlds, but in distinct ways.

In this article I consider how the progressive teaching practices of a detracked core program were reshaped from the teachers' original intentions as the students in the core enacted them. It focuses on the enactment of one such practice - small group work - a practice much touted for its effectiveness in detracked settings. Small group work, I found, presented a "catch 22" for the progressive teachers of the detracked core. They were committed to using detracking, and small group work in particular, as a launching pad for improving relationships between diverse students and as a way to "shelter" the curriculum for less-prepared students. However, the very act of "balancing" groups for a diversity of race, gender, and academic skill often served to exacerbate underlying tensions among the students in the detracked class. By "unpacking" the complex interweaves of students' academic and social worlds inside the detracked class, this

article speaks to the challenges of teaching for social justice in a racially and socioeconomically polarized setting, and offers suggestions for practice.

Background

Tracking Critiqued

The practice of tracking in United States' schools, that is the sorting and grouping of students by perceived ability, has been sharply critiqued by many educational researchers and others over the past fifteen years. In *Keeping Track*, perhaps the most well-known critique of tracking, Jeannie Oakes argued that tracking serves to resegregate integrated schools and provide a differing quality of education to students in different tracks (1985). Lower track students, mainly poor and minority, she argued, receive an unchallenging, non-college bound curriculum delivered by the worst teachers, while students in the higher tracks, mainly white and middle to upper middle class, take part in a college bound curriculum which is more challenging, with teachers who are more experienced and involved. Tracking, in short, is one of the means by which the race and class linked inequalities notable in our schools and in society at large are reproduced.

Detracking, then, the conscious placement of academically and racially diverse students into one class, seems a logical response. And, indeed, disturbed by the implicit inequities of tracking, many schools have attempted to "detrack," consciously organizing students into academically heterogeneous classrooms. It seems obvious. Tracking creates inequity, therefore *de*track to reverse this inequity. Yet as a former social studies teacher and current researcher in detracked classrooms I know the matter is not so simple. The teachers in the detracked English-Social Studies core did not find the implementation of detracking to be simple either. In a survey of all of the teachers

teaching in this school's detracked ninth grade core program, almost all felt they had not been adequately prepared to teach in heterogeneous classrooms. [3]

Detracking Reform

Enticed by the prospect of dealing a swift blow to educational inequalities, many schools and teachers have struggled to detrack. However, the detracking "movement" is uniform neither in policy nor in practice. Detracking reforms range from allowing students to self-select into an A.P. English class, to creating new schools which teach one college preparatory curriculum to all students and have a radically altered approach to scheduling, to introducing new forms of assessment and pedagogy (Cone, 1992; Wheelock, 1994). Included under the banner of detracking are programs which eliminate the non-college track while maintaining an honors/A.P. track, classes which group together all but "gifted" students, those which select "high potential/low achieving" minority students for participation in college preparatory classes, and others which detrack one department or one age-grade (e.g. Mehan, 1994; Cooper, 1996; Lipman, 1998). What constitutes detracking and what detracking might come to be are currently in the process of being defined.

The wide range of reforms that fall under the detracking label makes it difficult to assess the impact of detracking upon students. Perhaps for this reason, much of the academic literature on detracking focuses on community and school conflicts over the issue rather than its effects upon student achievement (e.g. Wells, 1996; Wells & Serna, 1996; Oakes, et al, 1997; Cooper, 1996). From these studies of school and community discourse we know that the implementation of detracking at a school brings many power dynamics into play, especially in racially and socioeconomically diverse communities. These are useful findings for those attempting to implement detracking at an institutional

level. Past research, however, offers little insight into teaching and learning *inside* of the detracked classroom.

Group Work: The Detracking Solution

Mr. Apple and Mr. James frequently utilized cooperative group work as a teaching strategy in their detracked classrooms. Group work served multiple purposes. When the teacher assigned groups, it ensured that students were working with and getting to know peers who they might not have interacted with otherwise. The teachers felt that students, bringing various strengths to the group, would provide academic support for each other. Group work served to disrupt the traditional teacher-at-the-front-of-the-classroom model of pedagogy. Finally, the teachers hoped that students were learning valuable social skills through group work.

The teachers in the detracked core program were acting in correspondence with the recommended best practices for detracking in their frequent use of cooperative learning. Group work, or cooperative learning (here used interchangeably), emerges repeatedly in the literature as a recommended teaching practice for detracked classrooms (e.g. Bigelow, 1994; Cohen, 1993; Marsh and Raywid, 1994; Slavin, 1991; Wheelock, 1992). Cooperative learning is frequently linked with democratic education, and thus is aligned with the equity-geared goals of detracking. In cooperative learning groups, advocates write, students develop a "positive interdependence," while still being held individually accountable for their performance (Wheelock, 1992, p. 200). Researchers argue that cooperative learning improves the achievement of all children (Oakes and Lipton, 1992; Oakes and Goodlad, 1988; Joyce, 1991; Wheelock, 1992; Slavin, 1995). Cohen argues out that the collaborative skills for effective group-work which students learn, under the guidance of their teachers, help to break down status hierarchies within the classroom (1986).

Yet how do these notions of "positive interdependence," "breaking down status hierarchies," and "improving the achievement of all children" actually play out in the detracked classroom? Despite the large body of literature advocating particular teaching methods, such as group work, for detracking, there has been little systematic research conducted on actual detracking practices (Mehan, 1996), and none which considers how detracking affects students' social worlds in the classroom. Much of the academic literature on detracking focuses on community and school conflicts over the issue (e.g. Wells, 1996; Wells & Serna, 1996; Oakes, et al, 1997; Cooper, 1996), rather than exploring its enactment by the diverse students the reform is meant to serve.

Detracking at Cedar High

Cedar High School is a large urban high school in the San Francisco Bay Area serving over 3,000 students. Cedar High School is both racially and socioeconomically diverse with a student population roughly 40% European American, 40% African American, 10% Latino and 10% Asian American. Race and class are closely linked, with European American students tending to come from middle and upper middle class families, and African American and Latino students mainly coming from working class or poor backgrounds. There is a striking achievement gap between students of color and European American students at this school. In addition, the tendency of students to form same-race social groups is noted by both students and teachers, and is readily apparent to casual observers. Cedar's detracking effort, begun 8 years ago, was part of an ongoing effort to combat both the achievement gap between European American students and their African American and Latino peers, and the racial polarization of students' social worlds.

In 1992, then, a new principal boldly pushed through a detracking reform at the ninth grade level. As part of this reform, all ability tracking in English classes was

eliminated, ninth grade English and World History classes were paired into "core" teams, class size in these classes was reduced to twenty, and the classes were configured to be intentionally heterogeneous in terms of race and perceived ability. The idea was to provide all students with a higher level curriculum in the core subjects of English and World History, to deepen content by forging interdisciplinary connections, to help ninth graders transition to high school by providing a smaller unit within the school, and to combat the social divide between African American and European American students by consciously integrating them at the ninth grade level. A reform, in short, directed at both the social and academic polarization along race and class lines that prevailed at Cedar. The classrooms which were the subject of this ethnographic study – the detracked ninth grade English-History core taught be Mr. Apple and Mr. James – resulted from these reforms.[4]

Method and Participants

Following Students Into and Out of the Detracked Classroom

Students live in multiple and interconnecting peer, school, family and community worlds, which intertwine to shape their experiences and identities as students (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991). In the detracked class students and teachers constructed patterns of behavior through their interactions with each other (Erickson, 1986; Mehan, 1982). To explore the multiple dimensions of students' and teachers' experiences in the detracked setting I collected data in four overlapping areas: 1) school context; 2) classroom practices; 3) students' navigation of classroom practices; 4) students' experiences across contexts.

Three types of data were collected for this study: fieldnotes from classroom observations, interviews of both teachers and students, and fieldnotes from "shadowing" or following students throughout their school days. Five focal students, selected for

racial and academic diversity, were each interviewed at the beginning and end of their ninth grade year. The English and history teachers of the detracked core, selected for their experience with and commitment to teaching in detracked settings, were interviewed as well. I observed and took fieldnotes for over 50 sessions of the core English and history classes over the course of a full academic year, focusing on watching students across both whole group and small group participant structures (Phillips, 1972). Finally, I followed each focal student beyond the walls of the detracked core classes, attending his or her other classes and traveling with the student between classes and at lunch.

The Academic and Social Worlds of Focal Students

Five focal students provided windows into the varied possibilities of detracking.

Different days. Table 1 summarizes relevant information about the focal students: Grant, Kiana, Mike[5], Sasha, and Tiffany. Race, as identified by the students, math level and language level, were part of the selection criteria for the focal students. The math/language levels indicate how students were tracked in the rest of their classes, whether or not they were on a college-bound trajectory.

[Table 1 here]

The daily schedules of the focal students were reflective of divisions in the school as a whole. Grant and Sasha, the two European American students in the study, were tracked high in their math and language classes, starting high school well positioned to build transcripts impressive to college admissions offices. Their high tracked classes were predominantly European American in enrollment, while their detracked English and history classes were more racially integrated. Kiana and Mike, taking entry-level language courses and Algebra I, would be able fulfill college entrance requirements as well, but would not be able to reach the highest levels of math and foreign language, and

would not have room for many electives. Their math and language classes were predominantly students of color, and they had more European American peers in the detracked core than in any other setting. Tiffany's placement in pre-Algebra and lack of enrollment in a language class meant that she would not be able to fulfill California public college requirements by the end of high school. Her low tracked math and science classes were almost entirely African American.

Resources and responsibilities. The resources and responsibilities of the focal students reflected the racial and socioeconomic disparities prevalent in this particular school context, and permeated students' negotiation of the practices of the detracked classroom. If we take a look at the daily lives of these students beyond classes that they attended together, we get a deeper understanding of what was happening in the detracked core. Outside resources allowed some students to build "cultural capital" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) – the skills, experiences, and behaviors which students brought with them into the detracked class – useful to them in the classroom context. Other students built cultural capital that was not perceived as useful, and could even be in conflict with what was valued in the class. The following table summarizes students' at-home responsibilities.

[Table 2 here]

While Kiana, Grant, and Sasha had fairly typical teenage days, doing homework, perhaps some babysitting, involvement in extracurricular activities, Tiffany had a schedule that would daunt the most organized and stoic of adults. Getting up at 5 a.m. she got her mother ready for her dialysis treatment, woke, dressed, and fed the 8 month old infant daughter of a friend of her sister who lived with her, and prepared the family's breakfast, all before school. She took the infant to daycare before arriving for her first class. After school she had a half-hour of free time before she picked up both the infant and her 2-year-old niece at day care. She then took care of her niece until 9 p.m. when

the girl's mother came for her. School, we might surmise, was Tiffany's only chance to be a kid, her only opportunity to socialize free of adult responsibilities, and her home life did not allow her much time for homework, although she told me she sometimes read her English book aloud to the two children in the evening.

Sasha, in contrast, had a private tutor to help her in Geometry, a subject which she struggled with but she knew was important for getting into college, and she was able to follow her interests with an unpaid internship set up for her by her mother in a local animation studio. Grant's parents specialized in their support of him, and he was able to take advanced math and computer classes inspired and assisted by his father, an engineer, while his mother, a lawyer, helped him with his writing assignments, staying up late with him to review multiple drafts of essays.

These aspects of students' lives came into play in the detracked classroom. Tiffany, for example, did not have much of an opportunity to complete reading assignments. As her peers observed her lack of familiarity with the text, she developed a reputation as a disinterested student. Sasha and Grant, on the other hand, had ample help available to them as they struggled with writing assignments, and garnered the benefits of this added support in the classroom. Being the sort of student with whom other students "wanted to work" was partially rooted in cultural capital. And in this class, as in almost any class found inside a U.S. high school, the cultural capital that was most valued was the type held by students like Sasha and Grant, whose comfort with classroom practices was shown in their every action. The cultural capital of a student like Tiffany, who probably knew more than many adults about managing a household, taking care of an infant, and caring for a dialysis patient, did not put her in a position of expertise with her peers or teachers in the detracked classroom.

Linking race and academic performance. The presumed link between race and academic performance was pervasive at Cedar, part of the backdrop against which

students' interactions took place. This racialized interplay of the social and the academic was reflected in the focal students' ideas about race and competence at Cedar. In our interviews, Sasha, Mike and Kiana discussed the expectations for competence for students from different racial backgrounds at the high school in ways that reflected their own positions in the school setting. "If you're a white girl you have different expectations," Sasha told me. "It feels like a lot of the friends I have that are white are like 'Oh my god, I got a B! My parents are going to be so upset! My teacher's not proud of me!' I don't seem to find that problem in a lot of my other friends who aren't white." This rather backhanded complement of her peers of color reflected a view, often heard from European American students and teachers, that European American families had higher academic expectations for their children.

Kiana had also thought about the achievement gap at Cedar, but from a different perspective. "I know that most of the AP classes and honors classes are predominantly white and that's really disappointing," she told me. Rather than viewing anxiety about school performance as a "problem," Kiana was troubled by the disparities she saw. "The thing that disappoints me is the statistics of the majority of black students at Cedar are failing and doing real poorly," Kiana told me at the end of her ninth grade year. Like Sasha, as she reflected on the school success of her friends race emerged as a salient line of division between higher and lower achieving peers. "My white friends," she said, "do fairly well, whereas my African American friends, my friends of color, they're just doing real poorly." Mike invoked a similar sentiment, attributing his academic success to his mixed race peer group. "Black people who hang out with just black people tend not to do as well as white people," he told me at the end of the year. "Since I hang out with both I think I do better than most black people." Mike, as an academically successful African American male, explained this success by drawing a distinction between himself and lower achieving African American students who remained in same-race peer

groups. This racial polarization of students' academic and social worlds was part of the backdrop against which individual students constructed senses of their competence and that of their peers. This article will explore how this all came together in the intimate context of small group work.

Teaching to Heal "The Bad Split":
The Progressive Practices of the Detracked Core

Teachers' Philosophies

> And so we have a bad split…I saw that right away and it kills you to see that. It's a heartbreaker. You like the diversity but you immediately see the white kids circling the wagons around their own sort of like "Oh I hope I'm not put in a group with Tiffany." And you see the Black kids move into defensiveness and disruptive defensiveness really quickly. And it's the job of the year.
>
> - Mr. Apple, English teacher in the detracked core

> My own experience tells me that it's [detracking] obviously not a panacea but given the alternatives it seems like the best choice that we have in terms of the things that seem really important to me in education. Certainly in terms of the big issues at Cedar High and the achievement gap and everything else.
>
> - Mr. James, History teacher in the detracked core

Mr. Apple and Mr. James, the focal teachers in this study were deeply committed to teaching as a social change profession, and saw detracking reform as one way to remedy the inequities described earlier. Combating the "bad split" and working against the "achievement gap" at Cedar was central to the values of both men, shaping their classroom practice.

The core teachers worked hard to create instructional practices consistent with their educational and political convictions. It was important to them that all students have access to the curriculum, and this took shape in the form of a range of practices which emphasized providing a variety of ways for students to connect with the curriculum intellectually, personally, culturally, and at different levels of competence. An accompanying goal was to encourage students to interact and learn from one another, particularly students who were separated socially in Cedar's polarized racial landscape.

Mr. Apple and Mr. James approached the content of their classes – reading and writing in the former and the study of world history in the latter – in a "progressive" manner. They wanted students to get excited, ask questions, and consider "big ideas," rather than memorize sets of facts or write in a prescribed manner. Mr. James told me one of his main goals was to create,

> Just a kind of excitement and interest and curiosity that I want to try and cultivate in students. One product of students having that level of engagement is that they start to ask a lot of questions and want to know the answers and explore things in different ways that didn't occur to them or they wouldn't have thought of before.

The pedagogical practices of the detracked core were planned with these goals in mind.

Progressive Pedagogy: Practices and Participant Structures

While observing in the core classes, I became familiar with practices which could be categorized into three groups: multiple intelligences/interactive practices; practices emphasizing "relevance," be it cultural, personal, or youth culture; and practices which "scaffolded" content and skills. These practices took place within either whole group or small group "participant structures" (Phillips, 1972), the former emphasizing active participation and the latter revolving around academic interdependence. Taken together, these practices were the basis of a progressive curricular approach similar to that

frequently recommended in the detracking literature (e.g. Wheelock, 1992; Cone, 1993; Marsh and Raywid, 1994).

Practices. Multiple intelligence and interactive practices were practices that drew upon skills beyond traditional ones and incorporated art, drama, music and other ways of learning and expression into the completion or presentation of an assignment. These were practices intended to involve greater numbers of students and showcase a variety of skills, and also to be more fun and interesting for the kids. In activities like the "Sharing of Written and Drawn 'Character Sketches' from *The Tempest*," all of the students were invited to admire both the artwork and the written work of their peers. As the teacher stood in the middle of the large circle of students, holding up examples of artwork and calling on individuals to read their written "sketches," the students oohed and ahhed at the wide variety of work. In the "Slide Show of the French Revolution" activity, slides of artwork representing various aspects of the French Revolution were displayed on the screen, and students inferred and discussed from this different medium.

"Relevant" practices were those which tried to connect the content under study with some aspect of students' experiences. Culturally relevant practices, which could also be called "multicultural," attempted to draw connections between Eurocentric curriculum and African American history, with the presumption being that this would establish a connection to the material for the African American students in the class. One example was that of Mr. Apple reading from a speech that WEB DuBois gave at Fisk University in which he cited Galileo in his argument for being courageous in the pursuit of racial equality. Practices relevant to "youth culture" were those in which the teacher used a popular cultural reference in an attempt to connect the material to students' non-school lives. Bringing in the film *Wayne's World* and showing the segment where Wayne and Garth, the main characters, are driving in their car singing along loudly to the song "We Are the Champions" by Queen, a song which has as a bridge the words "Galileo, Galileo,"

was an example of this. Finally, personally rels philosophy, Mr. Apple created assignments designed to help students connect personally with texts and ideas through their writing. This included journal writing on student-selected books, self-exploratory writing on topics such as "a time when I was self-reliant" and "my greatest fear," and building an "identity box."

"Scaffolding" practices were practices designed to ensure that all of the students were able to keep up with the class, regardless of academic preparation and skill level. Practices such as Mr. Apple's "textual discussion," in which the class read aloud from the book and discussed it, were a way for him to "bridge" the gap between students who had read and those who had not. "One way I try to bride that," he told me, when I asked him what he did when students did not read, "is I do textual discussion. We'll read a page and talk about that page for a long time. So that in a way I'm giving them some book experience." Grouping students to intentionally mix those seen as having different levels of competency, which will be discussed later, was another commonly used scaffolding practice.

Participant structures. Whole class and small group participation structures carried with them particular expectations for appropriate participation, and provided particular types of opportunities for kids to both observe and work with one another (Phillips, 1972). As Phillips discussed in her research regarding Native American children's participation in discussions in elementary classrooms, the normative expectations structuring student participation deeply affect the ability of students to participate in classroom discussions. In the detracked classroom, different participant structures carried different expectations for participation and interdependence with peers, with consequences for students' emerging social and academic identities.

In whole class activities the classroom was structured so that students were on display to each other. Unlike a more traditional set-up, in which students faced front and

listened to the teacher, the expectations for whole class activities were for active participation in a variety of ways. In this frequently occurring participant structure, students were seated where they could see one another, in circles or L-shaped or U-shaped arrangements; discussions were frequent, as was reading aloud from their own work, and interactive activities in which students could readily observe each other.

The whole class participant structure was a public one, creating a forum perfectly suited for students to observe each other, and observe they did. Sasha told me, speaking of Mr. Apple's English class,

> You always have to participate...Actually you have to think about what you're saying. In lots of classes you can just kind of say "Well, in 1892 this is what happened." But in English, if we're reading something and discussing it you actually have to think about what you're talking about...when someone says something totally random that makes no sense, it's just kind of pushed to the side and ignored and we keep going.

Grant also paid attention to the participation of his peers, and felt he could discern the among of effort they were putting into the class. "You can tell some people study a lot and some people really work hard in the class and some people just slack off," he told me. Like Sasha, he was impatient with those who he felt were not on track. "It gets annoying sometimes in class," he told me, "when somebody's completely off ball, not knowing what everybody's doing and then somebody moves ahead of the class." Kiana was also a keen observer of her peers, cataloguing their participation in both class discussions and written assignments. She described her classmates, telling me

> I know some people that have the most brilliant things to say constantly in class. Talking, contributing to the discussion and they never do their work. There are some people that are so quiet, never talk, but they're always sending in their work.

These whole class interactions, then, were the sites within which students developed opinions about the competency of their peers and the desirability of particular classmates as group members.

In small group activities in the detracked core students were expected to work together on projects and activities which called for interdependence. In such activities as preparing for a debate, taking a group quiz, and peer editing, students shared the workload, negotiated assigned tasks, instructed and questioned each other. The small group setting also provided an opportunity for social interactions, particularly between students who usually did not come into proximity with one another. This group work often resulted in a shared grade. Students' ideas about each other's competence became highly salient in these contexts, particularly when, as was standard practice, the teacher structured the group with racial and academic diversity as his criteria.

In these group work situations, then, students were expected to work closely together, often toward a collective reward. Such activities involved complex interactions, as students needed to divide up workload, assign roles, and explain things to one another. Consider, for example, an activity such as the "Preparation for the French Revolution Press Conference," in which students had to decide who was to take on which roles. The roles were different in the amount of reading, writing, and research they involved, so such decisions had consequences for the amount and type of work for which each student would become responsible. Students' preconceptions about each others competency were at play in these negotiations in a way that they were not in the whole class activities in which students were displayed to each other, but were not interdependent in a practical sense.

A Perfect Pedagogy? Small Group Work in the Detracked Classroom

Official Views: Teachers' Vision of the Ideal Group

Mr. Apple and Mr. James, in correspondence with much of the literature on detracking and group work, felt that small group work was a practice which was well suited to the twin goals of integration and educational equity in the detracked classroom (Oakes and Lipton, 1992; Oakes and Goodlad, 1988; Slavin, 1991; Wheelock, 1992). They felt that, by working in small groups, students would get to know each other across racial lines, learn to value individual strengths and differences, and difficult material would be "sheltered" for less able students. In carefully balancing group membership to reach these ends, however, the teachers sometimes structured groups in ways that inadvertently raised tensions and played into students' own assumptions about each others' competence.

Seeking "balance." The detracked core teachers thought carefully about their grouping decisions. In their group assignments they sought a "balance" of a number of characteristics. As Mr. James told me,

> So generally when I'm putting groups together I'm trying to balance them in a number of different ways – by gender and ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds and personality type...it feels like a very, very inexact science.

Mr. Apple emphasized the need to construct groups around students' academic strengths and weaknesses, telling me he "looked for skill mixing and compatibility" as well as ethnic diversity. Both teachers were trying to achieve a "mix" or a "balance" of a variety of academic, socioeconomic, and social "traits" for both academic and social purposes.

Supporting different learning styles. The core teachers felt that group-work would assist students academically and teach them to value the different academic strengths of their peers. However, there was an inherent difficulty, Mr. James felt, in teaching

students to appreciate differences in learning styles while still maintaining traditional markers of academic competence. As he told me,

> I think it's hard to undo the sense that the smart kids are the ones that can write well and read well. To get students to understand on a simple level that somebody can represent something, say, visually in a really creative way and that's as much of a strength as the strength that another kid might be able to write really well. Not everybody will be good at all of these things but everybody will be good at least one of them. That kind of mantra. I think that's important, definitely, but it only goes so far in the context where there's still for a lot of kids strong, internalized values built up over the years.

He attacked this problem by "try[ing] to raise the status of certain tasks," such as drawing. Despite this, groups were built with an eye toward balancing "strong" and "weak" kids, as defined in a traditional academic sense. "I do build it from the weak kids up," Mr. Apple told me. "I don't build it from the strong kids down." In this way, the markers of competence constructed in the whole class context made their way into the small group context. Students who were competent readers and writers, and who kept up with their assigned work were positioned as experts and those who were seen as behind in their skills were positioned as needing help.

Learning from diversity. Group-work also fulfilled a democratizing role for the core teachers by bringing "kids who are different" into proximity with each other. Mr. James told me he felt group-work taught kids to appreciate differences, saying

> It's about teaching them about why we're doing it that way and why it's important for them to be able to work in a variety of different groups with people who they might not choose, with other kids who are different from them, and be able to

> appreciate those differences and appreciate the different strengths that everybody brings to a group.

Group work was a way for students to learn about one another, appreciate differences, and develop the ability to work with others. This was all the more important in the racially and socioeconomically polarized Cedar context in which African American and European American students rarely formed friendships. Mr. James thought it was particularly important for European American students to learn more about the "different life experiences" of their African American peers.

Constructing groups around racial and socioeconomic difference could be "tricky," Mr. Apple told me, "especially if blacks are the racial minority, you're always separating them...there will be one black kid in each group." Within the Cedar context, having one African American student in each group usually meant that that student did not have any friends in that group and it often meant that that student was also positioned as a "weak" student. This exacerbated the correspondence between race and achievement that polarized both the whole class context and the school as a whole.

"Problem-childs" and "group-makers." "Personality," was another key aspect of constructing groups. As Mr. James told me, "A lot of it's about – especially the ninth graders – about thinking about who's going to be able to get along with each other." Mr. Apple put the matter more graphically, dubbing some students "problem-childs" and others "group-makers." "Problem-childs" were students who were hard to place into groups for an assortment of reasons. They were kids that you had "to be careful that they don't get beat up or be insulting. Grant, although a high achieving European American boy, fit into this category, according to Mr. Apple, because he was difficult to work with and socially inept. Tiffany and her friend Christie fit into this category as well, as they took offense easily, and had trouble settling down to work. Other students were

"group-makers," flexible and socially skillful "kids that would always make a group work." These students were academically inclined, compliant, and usually doing well in class. "Amalia, Jocelyn, Terry, even Sam and Mike. Tommy, Kiana, and Sasha," were all group-makers, and Mr. Apple felt fortunate to have so many of them in the third period English class.

This balance of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, personality type, and skill was difficult to achieve, both teachers told me. While teachers seemed to base group configuration on difference, students, as we will see below, desired compatibility often based on sameness.

Unofficial Views: Students' Visions of the Ideal Group

Students wanted group members who were academically competent, complementarily skilled, fun to be with, motivating, and respectful. Many of these attributes were in conflict with the criteria the teachers used when configuring small groups. Students based their judgements about with whom they would want to work in a small group on how their peers displayed themselves in the whole class context, as well as upon previous experiences in the small group setting. The following table juxtaposes focal students' talk about with whom they wanted to work in a small group.

[Table 3 here]

Academic competence. In the table above students referred to a construction of competence, in the small group setting, which was consistent with how they defined what being a "good student" looked like in the whole class context. Thus a good group member would be someone who was "always reading" (Grant), who "does the work" (Kiana), who did not "play around" (Mike), who "actually works" (Sasha), and who did not "like to mess around" (Tiffany).

If the teachers were structuring groups for a "balance" of academic skill, however, it would not be possible for every group member to share the traits of the "good student." Groups were built around "weak students." Thus some students came into the small group setting bearing reputations as "bad students," students who did not care about their work and who disregarded the rules of the classroom. This was a difficult position to hold in a group setting, and often led to a reduction in responsibility for those students, as we will see in the episodes that follow.

Fun. Consistent with the more social and intimate setting of the small group participant structure, students wanted to work with peers who they thought would be "fun" to be with. Sasha told me that she wanted to work with "Someone who could joke around. When you work really, really hard after a while you get really, really punchy, and you just want to stop and joke around." This sense of "fun" was often easier to achieve between students with shared cultural assumptions and previous social connections. As we will see in this article, some students were able to fulfill their desire to have fun in their small groups while continuing to meet academic goals and maintain the teacher's approval. For other students, choosing to have fun with friends in their groups meant sacrificing academic goals, and drew negative attention from the teacher. Several episodes considered later in this in this article will explore this issue.

A motivating force. Some students spoke of desiring group members who could keep the group moving along. These students were the "group-makers" of whom Mr. Apple spoke, and they were in demand. Grant told me he would like to have in his group "Somebody who's kind of social and sort of a leader. I might pick Sasha. She's good at that...Somebody who'll just keep us all working on the same thing and not let us go on to something we're not supposed to do." Mike also looked to other group members for motivation. He told me, "I try to pick people who I know will do the work and they'll be committed. Then I will too, so it will work real well." Tiffany looked for this as well,

saying she would like to work with "Sasha and Nora and Terry. Because they're really smart and they help me a lot." Sasha, perhaps sensing her role as group-maker, complained "I don't like coming up with it all by myself." Students came into the small group setting with reputations constructed in the context of whole class activities. Some were seen as desirable group members, and others were seen as undesirable based upon their display in the whole class context. Again, this put some students into difficult positions during small group activities.

Respect. Both Tiffany and Kiana mentioned respectfulness as an essential quality of a group work partner. Tiffany told me,

> I don't like some people in the class because their attitude is very bad. You could just ask them a question and they'd be like "I don't know. Ask the teacher." And I really hate that. If somebody asks you a question, don't get mad at you for asking you a question.

In the table she talked about hating it when people would "tell me the answer" rather than "helping me find it." Aware of how she was perceived by her peers, Tiffany sought group-mates that would be able to help her out without positioning her as incompetent. The teachers' intentional placement of lower achieving students with higher achieving students ran the risk of exacerbating this dynamic, as the higher achieving students tended to feel frustrated with their lower achieving peers in group situations, as the comments by Grant, Sasha, and Kiana indicated.

There was a racial dimension to the issue of respect, as hinted at by Kiana's comment about being disrespected in group-work situations. Although Kiana was a higher achieving student, in the table she describes being disrespected by her peers similarly to Tiffany, complaining that they "treated me like I was ignorant," and implying that this assumption was racially based. Mr. Apple noted this dynamic, and commented on the tendency of some higher achieving European American students to "circle the

wagons," avoiding their African American peers as group work partners. Mr. James noted that

> That to me is one of the big tensions with the white kids in particular. This attitude that they'll pay a certain lip service to the idea of detracking ...The achievement gap is a big problem and we talk about it. They understand that and yet at the same time they have this attitude that kids of color in the class are the ones who don't get it and are disruptive and in a lot of cases stand in the way of these really important personal goals that they have for wanting to get that education...It gets voiced in different ways. I was thinking about it because sometimes it gets voiced in the context of group work. When I've chosen groups and when students say: "Mr. James, Frankie won't do any work. It's really hard to be in a group with him. I don't know what we're supposed to do."

Although the teachers attributed this "attitude" on the part of some of the higher achieving European American students to those students' fear of not doing well in class, Tiffany and Kiana felt these attitudes were rooted in a lack of respect for them. When students were placed in groups with peers who they had preconceptions about in terms of their academic competence and the level of respect they would show them, tensions arose.

The Catch-22 of "Balance"

Configuring groups, therefore, was something of a "catch-22" for teachers. The teachers' configuration of groups on the basis of difference was often at odds with students' grouping desires. In teacher-configured groups, students were brought together who were suspicious of each other for a variety of reasons. Group configuration based on academic and racial "characteristics" dovetailed neatly with students' preconceptions about one another. This dynamic, in the intimate and interdependent setting of small group-work, often heightened the tensions that existed in the whole class

context. Yet if the teachers were to let students group according to whom they feel comfortable with, then they would return to the very same divisions of race, class, and ability ("tracks") that stimulated the idea of detracking in the first place!

Furthering this tension was the academic interdependence of group-work. Some students were prized as valuable group members, while others were seen as "dead weight" (how Kiana described Tiffany and Christie to me as group members) in the small group setting of the detracked core. In this context, "pick[ing] someone who can help you get a good grade," as Mr. Apple instructed the class one day as they formed their own groups, meant that some students would be sought out as group members, and others avoided. Academic competence, as constructed in the whole group context, played into the positioning of students as group members.

These tensions can be better understood when considering the racially polarized academic and social landscapes of Cedar High which framed the detracked class. In this context, even high achieving African American students, such as Kiana, at times experienced a lack of respect from their European American peers who had developed negative assumptions about them based on racial identity. For students like Tiffany, who struggled with the demands of the detracked class, her positioning in the small group context almost invariably resulted in a diminishment of her sense of herself as a student. The following section will explore further how issues of race, class, and gender emerged in the more intimate setting of small group work.

Group-Work in Action

"Press Conference": The Tensions of an Intimate Setting

When students worked in small groups in the detracked core, they were brought into closer proximity with one another, physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. As mentioned earlier, the expectation for small group work was that

students were to participate in accomplishing an academic goal, such as completing a quiz, preparing for an enactment, or filling out a map. This could involve negotiating over tasks, holding each other accountable for completing work, explaining assignments and concepts to one another, and depending upon each other for a grade. In small groups, this academic interdependence took place in a more "intimate" context. Due to the students' physical proximity to one another, the opportunity for them to engage in non-academic talk, and their relative distance from the teacher's watchful eye, unofficial interactions came to the fore in the small group setting. As explored in the previous section, the way small groups were structured by the teachers often served to exacerbate pre-existing tensions, particularly along lines of race, gender, class and competence, the very traits upon which groups were constructed.

The following episode demonstrates the increased intimacy, interdependence, and underlying tensions in small group work in the detracked core.

Preparation for a Press Conference on the French Revolution

Data for non-focal students:
Frankie: boy, African American, lower achieving[6]
Tommy: boy, European American, higher achieving

Mr. James explains the day's task to the class, preparing for a press conference with historical figures. Each group is representing one historical figure that will take part in a press conference. The group members take on different roles: actor, historian, public relations agent, and investigative reporter, to prepare the actor for the press conference. Each group is also to prepare a visual aid, with a picture of their figure, a quote, where they are from, and a symbol that helps to explain their ideas.

I am sitting by a group of three students: Sasha (one of the focal students), Tommy, and Frankie. Sasha and Tommy are sitting next to each other, and Frankie is across from Tommy. Frankie is the actor, portraying Louis the XIV, the group's character. Tommy is the investigative reporter, and his role is to ask questions of the other panel members. Sasha is the public relations agent, and she is charged with preparing Frankie, the actor, for his role.

"What are we supposed to be doing?" asks Tommy.

"You're supposed to be looking over the stuff," answers Frankie.

"That's what I'm doing!" replies Tommy. His voice raised, sounding annoyed.

Sasha leans over and marks something on Tommy's handout, indicating his role, and the description of his part in the press conference preparation.

Frankie turns to Sasha, and asks her "What school you go to last year?"

"Cedarville Prison Camp," she replies, a sarcastic tone in her voice conveying her

disgust with her previous school.

"What?" exclaims Frankie, sounding shocked and surprised that Sasha [a white girl, obviously middle class through her dress, speech, academic persona] was in a prison camp last year. He doesn't realize that this is a joke name for the private school she attended.

"C.P.C. - Cedarville Prison Camp," says Sasha emphatically, as though this clarifies things. Her tone indicates that she presumes that the initials "C.P.C." will be meaningful to Frankie.

"I'd hate to go to private school," says Tommy, somewhat scornfully. He knows the school that Sasha is referring to and is in on the inside joke of the name.

"They call it Cedarville Prison Camp?" asks Frankie, perplexed, now not understanding why a private school would be called a prison camp.

"Country Pastures Circle," Sasha explains, "but we call it "Cedarville Prison Camp" because there's high fences around it."

"That's because they're afraid of someone coming in and [said in a smarmy baby-talk voice] *hurting their children*," says Tommy, mockingly.

"Its just for the little kids," says Sasha, embarrassed.

Frankie ends the conversation by pulling a wrapped condom out of his backpack and showing it surreptitiously to Sasha.

"What's this for?" he asks Sasha, wide-eyed, feigning ignorance.

Sasha blushes, laughs and says "OK, lovely," trying for sarcasm.

Carrying out this group-work activity required complex negotiations among the three students. They needed to determine roles: who would be responsible for most of the reading, the writing, the research, and whom the others would coach and have the more public role of "actor." This required Tommy, Frankie, and Sasha to discuss and make determinations about the relative aptitude of each of them for the available tasks. After roles were distributed, the students were then dependent upon each other to carry out their assigned tasks. The consequence of a team member not living up to his or her responsibilities was a lower grade for the entire group, so for some students, the stakes were high. The tensions resulting from this interdependence can be seen in Tommy's rather terse attitude toward his two group mates. "Do you understand all of this?" Tommy asked Frankie, "Because they'll ask you some hard-ass questions." Later, Tommy called Sasha to account, saying "Start working, man. You haven't done anything this whole period." Mr. James noted this type of peer friction, telling me he saw it show up "when I've chosen groups and when students say 'Mr. James, Frankie won't

do any work. It's really hard to be in a group with him. I don't know what we're supposed to do.'"

The "Preparing for a Press Conference" episode played out amid the intertwining dimensions of race, class, and gender, as constructed in the Cedar High setting. Sasha took pains to disassociate herself from the exclusive private school she had attended the previous year by calling it "Cedarville Prison Camp," perhaps in an attempt to affiliate with Frankie, who she presumed would judge her negatively for having attended the school. In doing so, however, the distance between the two of them was highlighted. Frankie had never heard the ironic nickname for the school before, and, when Tommy pointed out that it was a private school, Frankie could not fathom why a private school would be referred to as a "prison camp." In saying, "I'd hate to go to private school," Tommy, a high achieving European American boy from a prominent Cedarville family, disaffiliated himself from his own milieu, perhaps also out of a desire to affiliate with Frankie.

In this episode, we saw Tommy ally himself with Frankie and against Sasha, using masculine interaction styles to affiliate himself with Frankie and distance himself from the class and race background he shared with Sasha. He disparaged "C.P.C.," attributing to the school an effete and class-related and "wimpy-ness" through his sarcastic comment about how the parents at the school feared someone "hurting their children." He was careful to state that he'd "hate private school," and roughly chastised Sasha at the end of the period, saying "Start working, man." Sasha, for her part, diminished her position by continually qualifying her statements. In saying "you might," "I think…" and "I think so" she reduced her expertise in her interaction with the boys.

High school is a romantically charged context – many interactions between boys and girls take place against the backdrop of these expectations. Frankie had a widespread reputation for "going after white girls," as Tiffany told me. I had seen him

interact flirtatiously with Sasha in an earlier class, purposefully passing by her desk and talking to her when he could have taken a more direct path to the door. In this context, the interaction between Frankie and Sasha had a romantic/sexual charge as well. She may not have wanted to seem like a spoiled white girl in front of this attractive, athletic, popular African American boy, another aspect of her attempt to distance herself from her class background. By taking out a condom and asking Sasha "What's this for?" Frankie was fulfilling his reputation as being romantically knowledgeable and embarrassing Sasha to boot. Attempting a sarcastic response, Sasha again tried to position herself as sophisticated.

The intimacy of the small group setting provided a context within which race, class, and gender dynamics emerged with more personal immediacy than the whole class setting. Demonstrations, questionings, and failures of academic competence took place at a one-on-one level. The unofficial classroom world, in other words, came to the fore in the small group setting.

"Map work": Students Meeting Social and Academic Goals in Small Groups

Some students were able to reach their academic and social goals concurrently as they worked together in small groups, while for others, the two overlapping worlds came into conflict in the small group context.

The following episode, "Map Work," illustrates this idea.

Map Work

Data for non-focal students
Nora: girl, European American, higher achieving
Jason: boy, European American, lower achieving
Artie: boy, European American, higher achieving
Natalie: girl, African American, lower achieving
Frankie: boy, African American, lower achieving

The main activity of the day is filling out a Teacher's Curriculum Institute worksheet with questions about the geography of South America and a blank map of the continent.

They are to fill out the map and answer the questions using the textbook and place-mat sized plastic covered maps for reference. Mr. James distributes the materials and tells the students that they can work alone or with others to complete the activity. He asks the class a couple of questions about last night's assigned reading, and Sasha volunteers to answer all of them.

The students get to work right away, some moving into groups and others working alone. Sasha, who is sitting next to her friends Nora, Jason, and Artie, all three European American, pulls closer to them and they begin to work together. Natalie, the only African American girl in class today, leaves Sasha's side of the room and goes over to the other side of the room to sit near Frankie, the only other African American student who is in attendance.

Hearing a noise in the hallway, Mr. James tells the class to continue working while he investigates. The noise level in the classroom rises, but Sasha's group sitting near me continues to fill in the handout, referring to the map. After a few minutes Mr. Apple comes in through the door between the two rooms to check on the class. He looks around and then leaves. A few minutes later a student teacher comes in, sits down with Natalie and Frankie, and I see her pointing to the plastic covered map and talking with the two students. She gestures to a European American student working alone, and motions her to join the group with Natalie and Frankie.

In Sasha's group, Sasha, Jason and Artie are looking for the answer to question 14 "What is the plain that covers most of central Argentina?" Sasha says "Pampas!" (with a short "a") "Pampas diapers!" The four students giggle at this play on words. The group of four continues to work collectively, filling in their individual sheets and laughing and joking as they do so.

Their work is getting done, but not at the expense of their social interaction. At one point I notice Jason and Nora having a brief mock battle, fencing with their pens. Another time, I see Sasha dancing in her seat. Later, she listens intently to Nora as the other girl narrates (with more animation than I have seen from Nora all year) a story about something that happened after school yesterday.

At the end of class when Mr. James is giving the notebook assignment, two groups of students are talking and laughing among themselves. One is Sasha's group, and the other is the group with Natalie and Frankie, across the room.

In response to the noise, Mr. James says, "I'm stopping." Sasha looks up, alert and tense, seemingly caught in the act by the teacher. "I'm worried about the threesome in the corner Mr. James says, " looking at group with Frankie and Natalie, and not even glancing at Sasha's group. Sasha visibly relaxes, then raises her hand to ask the teacher about the due date of a major project.

As she gets up to move next door to Mr. Apple's class through the doors that separate the two adjoining rooms she says to me "I'm unusually hyper. That's cool!"

In this episode, Sasha and her group members experienced a meshing of their academic and social goals. Their choice to work together was deemed appropriate by the teacher, who, by letting these friends work together, implicitly signaled his trust that they could handle it. As they worked, there was a good amount of joking, gossiping, and flirting, none of which drew the teacher's attention, as they were also conspicuously

completing the assignment as they chatted. Group members contributed to completing the task without a struggle over whom were to do what or questioning each other's competence. All of the ingredients for successful group work as defined by the students – competence, complementary skills, fun, motivation, and respect – existed in this group. The ingredients valued by the teacher, however – mix of skill levels, ethnic and class diversity – were not found in this group.

Mr. James reacted differently to the socializing of the two different groups. By chiding and drawing attention to the off-task behavior of Frankie's group, but not of Sasha's, he signaled a distinction between the two groups which was linked to the social and academic dimensions of the school context. While European American, higher achieving students could be trusted to socialize and get work done, his responses indicated, lower achieving, African American students could not. That this drew no attention was testimony to the strength of this trope in the school context.

As this episode demonstrated, students almost automatically moved toward peers of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds when given their free choice of group members. Given the contours of the social scene at Cedar High, they were also more likely to have out-of-class relationships with peers from similar backgrounds. This was one of the means by which the racial polarization of the social landscape of Cedar High was, at times, reproduced within the detracked classroom. Working together in small groups further solidified these social relationships, and became part of the reproductive dynamic as well.

This interplay between the social and the academic affected students differently. For Sasha, for example, working with friends was easy. It ensured academic success, a good time, and teacher approval. As a "group maker," Sasha was a sought after group member. Her friends in class had similar backgrounds and academic positioning. After all, as she told me, she did not "hang out with people that really don't care [about school]

because they're so different." All of this resulted in a congruence of academic and social goals for Sasha in the small group context.

For Kiana, on the other hand, there were hard choices to be made. She could work with her friends Tiffany and Christie, the other two African American girls in her English class. This was increasingly important to her as she came to identify with the African American peer group at Cedar. But this would bring academic difficulties. "I feel at times they're dead weight, as awful as that sounds," she told me of Christie and Tiffany as we discussed with whom she wanted to work in a small group. Kiana could work with higher achieving students, but she needed to be selective, as she had experienced a lack of respect from some of them. And, as she told me at the end of the year, she faced disapproval from African American friends if she affiliated too closely with European American students. Kiana experienced conflict between her academic and social goals, particularly when it came to the small group context.

Tiffany had an even smaller window of convergence between academic and social success. She felt comfortable with Kiana and felt she could get work done with her and with Terry as well. Other than that, with her other friends she had trouble getting work done. "Christie and I talk a lot," she told me. As discussed earlier, she felt a lack of respect from other students in the class. For Tiffany, small group work was more likely than not to be difficult and uncomfortable, both socially and academically. When the teachers chose the groups, she ended up working with peers she felt did not respect her, and, unless she ended up with Kiana or Terry in her group, when she was able to choose partners she often ended up in groups which did not complete their assigned tasks.

"Group Quiz": Shaping Academic Identity in the Group-Work Setting

In the following episode, "Group Quiz," we can see how the power of social relationships and students' pre-conceptions of each other to shape students' academic identities. The following episode centers on Tiffany and Grant, who have very different experiences as participants in the same small group.

"Group Quiz"

Data for non-focal students:
Christie: girl, African American, lower achieving
Dan: boy, European American, higher achieving
Frankie: boy, African American, lower achieving
Maggie: girl, European American, higher achieving
Pete: boy, European American, higher achieving

9:40 a.m.

As the bell rings, the students enter the room in a loose line. As the students notice that the room is organized into groups they slow down, each searching for his or her names on the white sheet of paper in the center of each grouping.

When the students have settled into their seats, I notice Mr. Apple has obviously tried to achieve a diverse "balance" of students in each group. Each group has one African American student and two or three European American students. The few Asian American and Latino students are spread among the groups as well.

"You are sitting in groups because, especially for this third period group, I'm trying to get you to meet new people and not talk so much," Mr. Apple tells the class. "The last quiz sorted out who is reading the book, who is not," he says, "and now, as a way to have the quizzes be less torturous we're trying something different today." This quiz will be a group quiz.

9:45 a.m.

Tiffany and Christie come in five minutes late, talking loudly to each other. Tiffany stops a few paces inside the room as she notices the seating arrangement.

"Uh uh, tables, uh uh, we got tables," she says, her voice clearly audible across the room. Then she continues, in a mock-teacher's voice,

"Find your name and get a seat!" She glances around the room quickly at the tables, most of which are already filled.

"I don't see my name!" she shouts.

"Does anyone see Tiffany's name?" Mr. Apple asks of the class.

"Here!" shouts a few voices, from the back of the room. It is the back left-hand corner table where Grant sits with three other European American students, Maggie, Pete, and Dan. All four are high achieving students. Tiffany goes over and looks at the group, but, as there is no empty seat, does not sit down.

"There ain't no chair," she shouts angrily across the room to Mr. Apple. "This is a little bitty table!"

Christie, meanwhile, has found her name in a group with two European American boys, and two empty desks. She swings her backpack up onto one of the empty desks and sits down, exclaiming:

"You trying to get all the black kids away from each other, before we cause a nuclear holocaust!" CLAP! She punctuates this statement with a loud clap of her hands.

Meanwhile, Tiffany has moved to the rear of the room. She is leaning against the back wall, between two windows, her arms folded across her chest, a somber expression on her face.

Mr. Apple explains again that they are going to have a "group quiz." There are ten questions up on the board about the book, *The Lord of the Flies*, and they are also supposed to do a drawing of the island.

"OK, now I'm glad I'm not sitting with them," says Christie. Frankie, a tall handsome African American boy turns to her from his seat in the group next to her and says, a smile on his face and playfulness in his voice,

"What did you say?"

Mr. Apple continues to explain the quiz, until he notices Tiffany standing against the wall behind her group's full table. He interrupts himself, saying

"I see an imbalance. Dan, can you move over here?" He points to the last empty seat in Christie's group.

"I don't see why Tiffany can't sit here," says Christie, plaintively.

"I do," Mr. Apple replies, as Dan moves into the desk across from Christie. Tiffany sits down in his place, next to Grant.

9:55 a.m.

In the group in the back left-hand corner Grant is looking up the answers to the quiz in the book and dictating them to Maggie, who is recording them on a piece of notebook paper. Pete is beginning the drawing. Grant directs the group's activities, telling Maggie what to write and Pete what to draw. Tiffany sits and watches this activity.

"How did Piggy die?" says Maggie, reading the next quiz question from the board. "He fell over the cliff and the boys threw rocks at him," she continues, answering the question.

"No," says Grant sharply, "they pushed Piggy over the cliff.

"Well that's how it happened in the movie," Maggie replies quietly.

After a couple of minutes sitting and watching, Tiffany gets up and starts to walk away from the group. Mr. Apple notices and asks her what she's doing.

"They know what they're doing. They don't need me," says Tiffany. He tells her to sit back down.

I ask Tiffany what they are supposed to be drawing. She says she doesn't know, and calls for Pete's attention to find out.

"Hey," she calls. He doesn't respond. "Hey!" she says more loudly, almost shouting.

"What?"

"What are we supposed to be drawing?"

"The island."

He continues to draw, outlining a land mass, trees, water, the sun with magic markers.

Tiffany looks around. A short, middle aged African American woman enters the classroom. Mr. Apple greets her at the door and they begin to speak quietly to each other. Tiffany sees her, and calls to Frankie sitting in the next group, saying

"Frankie, remember her from detention?"

"Yeah," he replies.

Meanwhile, back in Tiffany's group Pete is looking around for a copy of the book to help him with the drawing. Grant, holding his book open as he looks for answers, asks Maggie if she has her book. She does not.

"Do you have your book?" he asks Tiffany.

"What?," she replies.

"Do you have your book?" he asks again.

"Yeah," she says.

Grant asks if they can "borrow" it to do the map. Tiffany searches through her

backpack, pulls out a pristine copy of *The Lord of the Flies*, and hands it to Grant who gives it to Pete.

Mr. Apple comes over and hovers above the group for a moment.

"Who's doing the art?" he asks. He leaves without getting a reply.

Maggie and Pete are giggling as he draws. He has drawn several human figures, and is filling in them in with black magic marker.

"People aren't black!" Maggie exclaims. She flushes, and quickly corrects herself, saying "Yes they are, but not that color black."

The group process continues in this manner, with Grant looking up answers, Maggie writing them down, Pete drawing, and Tiffany looking around the room. Grant, Maggie, and Pete giggle and tease each other awkwardly as they work. Tiffany is silent.

10:07 a.m.

"Can we go sit outside?" Tiffany asks, calling across the room to Mr. Apple.

"Do you want to?" he asks.

"Yes."

"In just a minute."

"Take your time," she replies. Tiffany leaves the classroom, and Mr. Apple follows her out. Tiffany's group continues working as before.

Out in the hall Mr. Apple asks Tiffany what the problem is.

"They don't want me in their group. They don't think I'm smart," she tells him.

The teacher's attempt to create a "balance" of racial/ethnic diversity and academic skill in small groups was obvious in this episode. When Tiffany arrived to her assigned group and found that there were no seats available, rather than seat her in an empty seat next to her friend Christie, Mr. Apple moved Dan to Christie's group to make room for Tiffany, citing an "imbalance" between the two groups. While Mr. Apple had many factors in mind as he created and juggled the membership of these groups, including the reasonable desire to separate Tiffany and Christie, two good friends who often distracted one another during class, Christie, for one, saw racial dimensions in his arrangement of students. Her proclamation that he was "... trying to get all the black kids away from each other, before we cause a nuclear holocaust!" gave voice to this idea.

For the students in the class, the desirability of these assigned groups varied. Christie wondered why Tiffany could not sit with her, feeling a lack of connection with the two higher achieving European American boys in her group. Tiffany did not even want

to sit down with her group, resisting this until Mr. Apple's actions made joining that group inevitable. Grant, Maggie, and Pete (as will be discussed in detail) were able to meet the preconditions of competence, fun, mutual respect, and leadership/motivation which students desired in their group-mates, and conducted their group-work as though Tiffany did not exist. Their preconceptions about Tiffany as a group member were, perhaps, built upon their observations of her conduct in the whole class setting, where she frequently arrived late, was quite blunt about being unprepared, and often violated the officially defined procedures of the classroom. The lengths to which Mr. Apple went to place Tiffany within this group of otherwise higher achieving students perhaps served to confirm these preconceptions.

In the small group highlighted in "The Group Quiz," fractures of race, class, gender, and competence were brought to the fore. Grant, a student who consistently displayed his engagement and expertise in the whole group context of the detracked core, quickly took on a leadership role in the group, directing his peers in their completion of the quiz. He assigned Maggie the gender stereotyped role of writing down the answers, and belittled her contribution by disputing her version of how Piggy died in the book. These actions all reinforced his position as leader and expert.

Tiffany, on the other hand, was effectively excluded from the group. After clearly signaling her reluctance to be seated with the group, she sat down with them, and they made no attempt to involve her in the assigned task. Grant, Pete, and Maggie worked on the quiz without asking Tiffany for help, or even telling her what they were writing down and asking if she agreed. At one point, Grant asked if he could "borrow" her book (after asking the other group members first). When she volunteered the book, rather than asking her to look up answers, he handed the book over to Pete and had Pete carry out his orders. In this interaction Tiffany was clearly positioned as an outsider to the group.

The social interaction among the three European American students also contributed to Tiffany's exclusion from the group-work activity. Their joking behavior, including references that seemed obscure or irrelevant to Tiffany, solidified their social relationships, and left her on the outside. Race was imbedded in this dynamic, a source of unspoken tension and a clear but undiscussed marker of difference. Maggie's comment, "People aren't black!" and her subsequent embarrassment, hinted at this rift.

After Tiffany and Mr. Apple returned from their conference in the hallway, Mr. Apple stepped into the group's process and assigned Tiffany the role of "doing the art" for the activity. "Doing the art," which in this case meant coloring the ocean in, was a fairly simple activity with minimal relationship to the content under study, in this case the book *The Lord of the Flies*. In this role, Tiffany had little opportunity to develop and practice academic skills, and the content of the book was not "scaffolded" for her. And, perhaps in reaction to the simple-minded nature of the task, Tiffany became frustrated and left her group, throwing her marker across the room at Pete as a final gesture.

Within the rest of the class we also see some clear manifestations of the construction of race and competence within the larger context of Cedar High. When Christie, after learning that the activity underway was a "group quiz," remarked to Frankie that now she was glad she had not been seated with him, she was confirming the view, dominant in the Cedar context, that African American students were less motivated and/or less capable academically. Tiffany's comments to Frankie, when the detention monitor from middle school came into the room ("Hey Frankie, remember her from detention?"), also confirmed the link between race and competence prominent in the Cedar landscape.

As in "Map Work," some students were able to meet their academic and social goals concurrently during small group work, while others experienced conflict between these two worlds. Clearly, both Tiffany and Christie were frustrated in their attempts to

merge their academic and social worlds in this episode. Indeed, the very configuration of the small groups made such a convergence impossible. They both signaled their frustration with this state of affairs, and, through their unofficial interaction with their friends who were scattered about in different groups, continued to pursue their social goals, to the detriment of engagement with the content and procedures of the class. Thus Tiffany went to sit with Christie after she finally left the small group, the result being that neither Tiffany nor Christie was engaged with the content or procedures of the class. She also met social goals by furthering her affiliation with Frankie through calling his attention (and certainly the attention of their classmates) to the fact that they both were frequently in detention during middle school. In meeting her social goals, then, Tiffany was moving further away from developing and practicing academic skills.

Maggie, Pete, and Grant, on the other hand, seemed well positioned to merge their social and academic goals in the group-work context. Indeed, Grant was unusually social in this small group setting, joking and talking with his peers to a much greater extent than I had seen him before, or since. Their playful dynamic, joking about language and the drawing often verged on the flirtatious, with the two boys vying for Maggie's attention. All three participated in completing the task, with the clear leadership of Grant. This social dynamic among the three European American students served to further alienate Tiffany from the group, and she left the group, meeting her social needs elsewhere, but with clearly negative academic consequences.

Conclusions

Is Progressive Pedagogy Enough?

Although adults see schools in grand terms – as levelers of inequality, perpetrators of race and class reproduction, transmitters of our most cherished cultural values - some sort of collective amnesia prevents us from, as adults, remembering that

for most students, schools are largely social spaces. Schools house intricate networks of friendship, romance, and animosity, networks which are themselves part of larger sociocultural and economic patterns of difference outside of schools. The classroom and the curriculum are an often drab setting against which the colorful, energetic, and emotional drama of human relationships are acted out.

But this does not mean that school reform is meaningless to students. On the contrary, anything that affects the trajectory of students' days – who is available for them to talk to in class, when, for how long, and under what circumstances they come together with which peers, what they are told to do when together – is very significant for students. Any reshuffling of the deck, any rearrangement of the points of contact for each individual young person in his or her daily routine flips through that student's intricately constructed social world. And detracking is nothing if not a reshuffling of traditional arrangements.

In this study, I found that progressive educators' hopeful reliance on small group work as a pedagogy for creating equity in the detracked setting became considerably more complex when enacted by students in a particular setting. At Cedar, the close and much discussed correspondence between race, class and academic achievement, along with the general separation of student social groups by race, permeated every interaction in the detracked classroom. During small group work these tensions were particularly apparent.

Thus, in the "Press Conference" episode, underlying tensions around race, class and gender came to the fore in the intimate setting of group work, as students negotiated assigned academic tasks. Sasha and Frankie's misunderstanding about the meaning of the nickname "Cedar Prison Camp" is one example of how these divisions could emerge amid students' routine completion of an assignment. Differences in students' abilities to meet both social and academic goals during group work were evident during "Map

Work." While Sasha and her friends giggled, joked, and completed their worksheet, other students drew remonstrance from the teacher as they did the same. High achieving African American students like Kiana faced difficult choices when deciding with whom they wanted to work during small group work. Finally, "Group Quiz" demonstrated how students carried preconceptions about each other's competence with them into the small group setting. Peer interactions during group work were shaped by these preconceptions, and the competence of certain students was affirmed, while others were excluded from participation in the group. In the end, the group's compliance to Grant's leadership confirmed his expert status, while Tiffany left the group before the end of class, telling the teacher "they don't think I'm smart." In this instance, group work in the detracked setting seemed to promote the very inequities it was implemented to combat.

Jean Anyon writes that "our systems of social class and racial organization are significant impediments to the success of restructuring and other reform attempts (1997, p. 13)." Detracking, one of a variety of reforms aimed at resolving race and class–based inequities in our public schools, is certainly affected by these imbalances in wider society. Creating effective practice for detracked classrooms may be rooted in an examination of how larger inequalities manifest themselves in the classroom settings. Progressive pedagogy, in other words, may not be enough.

Institutional and Classroom Possibilities

For teachers and administrators not willing to wait for a social revolution, however, there are structural changes that might lessen the race and class-linked social and academic divisions that disrupted the good intentions of detracking at Cedar. Rather than focusing on pedagogical adjustments that individual teachers can make in their own classrooms, these suggestions are aimed at what I believe this youth-centered look at detracking in practice reveals: there are barriers to detracking which go beyond

the realm of pedagogy and that confound even the most committed and experienced of teachers. If combating social polarization and providing support for achievement disparity are crucial to the success of detracking, then the following suggestions might be useful.

Building community/combating social divisions. Building social relationships between students who do not know each other well seems to be critical to the success detracked classes. Kiana's fear of working in a small group with students who were not already her friends, Tiffany's exclusion from the endeavors of her assigned group, and the movement of students into same-race groups during "Map Work" all reflect the extension of school-wide social boundaries into the classroom setting. Yet if detracking is to realize its goals, then students must extend their social relationships beyond those that prevail in the larger school context. If, as at Cedar, these race-based divisions persist unchallenged, the accompanying educational split will persist as well, aided by peer expectations and pressure.

Ninth grade students are good targets for adult intervention in their emerging social relationships, as they are struggling to find a place for themselves in an unfamiliar territory. Teachers can create activities to build social relationships among students, such as intentionally scrambling groups for less academic activities, and leading activities that call upon different types of knowledge and skills. Larger changes in the school structure can address this issue as well. The success of detracking is linked to the ability of the school's adults to encourage a change in the social landscape of the school. This could be effected through structural reform, creating smaller schools-within-schools which would explicitly foster community among diverse students. Meaningful orientation activities for ninth graders might be helpful as well. Also important is a reconsideration of the social spaces of the school, which in their current stark vastness (the central plaza) and discomfort (school hallways) encouraged defensive huddling

rather than friendly mingling. Adult attention to students' social needs would be a positive change from the current laissez-faire attitude toward this dimension of school life, and would facilitate the collaborative interaction of students in the school's detracked classes.

Supporting higher expectations amid resource inequity. Struggling students often need more than study halls and extra attention from individual teachers, especially when academic expectations are raised. Tiffany is a case in point. With overwhelming home responsibilities and lower than grade-level academic skills, Tiffany had difficulty meeting the increased expectations of the detracked classroom. Targeted tutoring and/or support classes have been shown to be effect in supporting such students (Mehan, 1994; Rubin, 1997). Institutionalized mechanisms for tracking the progress of students across classes would enable the school to target students for comprehensive support, rather than the piecemeal supports that exist currently. The school could also build stronger ties with community organizations that offer support services for students, and work to maintain better relationships with families to foster a sense of collaboration with parents, rather than the often adversarial relationship which currently exists. In *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools* (1995), Guadalupe Valdes argues for the necessity of such relationships for students' success.

This study hinted at the wide disparity in enrichment or out-of-school opportunities for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds at Cedar High. A comparison of Sasha's private tutor for Geometry and unpaid internship at an animation studio with Tiffany's lack of such opportunities demonstrates this gulf. Networking with local businesses and organizations to provide after-school opportunities, and the provision of tutoring support for low income students so they could successfully complete difficult courses are a few possible ways to remedy this inequity. A summer

school designed to accelerate achievement, preparing more students to take the school's advanced math, science, and computer courses (now almost exclusively European American), would encourage a shift in enrollment patterns in these courses and mitigate the effects of economic privilege.

Youth-Centered Research on School Reform

As teachers and other school reformers struggle to create more equitable educational settings for students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, it is vital that we examine the enactment of such practices by the intended beneficiaries – the students. At Cedar, the "official" world of the detracked core was framed by "progressive" teaching practices created by well-intentioned teachers. Yet the "unofficial" or social world of the detracked English-History core was equally important to students, and fully implicated in their academic opportunities within the class. Such an understanding can only be gained by observing and soliciting the perspective of students as they move through daily life in schools.

A youth-centered perspective on detracking reform reveals the difficulties inherent in attempting to remedy widespread racial and socioeconomic inequalities through classroom-based reform. This approach to studying school reform is overlooked, but is critical, both for teachers implementing equity-geared reforms and researchers hoping to contribute to the school reform literature. Youth-centered research provides a valuable window into student experiences for teachers, perhaps allowing them to look beyond their own classrooms for the causes of and solutions for pressing inequities. For researchers, looking at student perspectives reveals how school reform impacts the targets of that reform – the students, and creates a more complex picture of how a reform moves from theory to reality.

Concerned with the injustices of tracking, yet troubled by the difficulties of performing well in more challenging classes after years of inadequate preparation, many students were well aware of these complexities and tensions. Christie[7], Tiffany's best friend, told me that the biggest problem with tracking was that there was "a lot more racism. A lot more making fun of people....Like in my pre-algebra class it's all black kids in there. So therefore, like say for instance the higher English class [if English was tracked] might have like one or two black people in there." Yoshi[8], another classmate, echoed this concern with the link between tracking and race, telling me "when they were tracking, a lot of the colored kids would be it seems like in a lower track. All the white kids and everything would be in higher tracking. I think you should get the same education no matter who you are." Yet, as Christie told me, "I also think it's kind of bad because all of the people who would have been in the lower level, like they might get lost, they might not be able to keep up." For Christie and Yoshi, detracking was a blow against the institutional racism they believed to be embedded in the very structure of their high school, yet it was not enough.

It is our duty, I believe, to go beyond simply placing students with different educational backgrounds into the same classroom, and to strive to make it possible for students "who would have been in the lower level" to actually succeed academically within those classes. It will be worth the effort, not just for those individuals, but for all students, and for our democracy as well. As Sasha told me,

> It's a life thing...You always learn in school. That's kind of the way it is. But all those kind of things that you're going to remember is going to be all the relationships. All the different people you worked with and how to work with those people. You're going to carry that a lot longer than you are how to find the area of a triangle or something.

The promise of detracking, as Sasha points out, lies in its social nature. Yet therein rest many of its more difficult aspects as well. Detracking challenges both teachers and researchers to grapple with dimensions of students' school experiences that are often hidden from adult view, yet are devastatingly important. Attending to the unofficial school and classroom worlds of students may lead us to a more sensitive and effective implementation of detracking and other equity-geared reforms.

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Footnotes

[1] All names of people and places in this article are pseudonyms.

[2] "Core" refers to the pairing of English and history classes in the ninth grade at the high school discussed in this article.

[3] In a study of the ninth grade core program conducted by a university research team teachers complained of a lack of training for teaching heterogeneous groups and not enough time to plan integrated curriculum. The majority felt that social goals of integration were achieved through the core, however, and supported its continuation.

[4] This particular core was sitated within a "small school" within the larger school. Thus the level of interaction between Mr. Apple and Mr. James was unusually high for a core team at Cedar, as the two men had chosen to work with each other and both were deeply committed to implementing reforms which would improve education at Cedar.

[5] Due to space constraints Mike's experiences will not be described in the body of this article.

[6] It was necessary, in this study, to write about or indicate "attributes" of individuals that I believe to be constructed within social settings rather than to be innate or essential. There is an inherent conflict between my view of race/ethnicity, gender, and academic positioning as contingent and constructed, and the use of such labels to describe individuals. That being said, it would not be possible to understand the significance of particular settings, interactions, and outcomes for the individuals in this study without having some reference point with which to mark these aspects of identity. It is significant, for example, that Tiffany, a lower achieving African American girl, when working with a small group of higher achieving European American students, came to see herself as "not smart" in an episode described below. If we do not know the

racial/ethnic identities or academic positioning of the students involved, the entire episode becomes meaningless, as least for the purposes of this discussion.

Additionally, the individuals in this study (most individuals, really) do see themselves as being members of particular racial/ethnic groups and holders of particular academic positions. Finally, people are often treated differently based upon these categories. To not mark and consider these elements, therefore, would be disingenuous.

I attempt to navigate this contradiction by using terms such as "African American" and "European American" rather than those used by the focal participants ("Black" and "White"). In doing so I wish to indicate a sense of identity as based more upon ethnic affiliation rather than innate racial difference. I also situate students' academic positions within particular contexts, and attempt to illuminate how students came to be constructed as "higher" and "lower" achievers.

[7] Christie is an African American girl. She was enrolled in pre-Algebra and not enrolled in a language class her ninth grade year, effectively placing her in a lower track in her non-detracked classes.

[8] Yoshi is a boy who self identifies as a mix of African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American. He lives in a predominantly African American neighborhood, and most of his friends are African American. He was in Algebra I and Spanish I in his ninth grade year, effectively placing him in a "general" track in his non-detracked classes.

Table 1

Focal Student Information

Focal Student	Gender	Race/Ethnicity[8]	Math Level	Language Level
Grant	Male	Eur. Am.	Honors Geometry	French 3/4
Kiana	Female	Biracial: Af. Am. and Eur. Am.	Algebra I	Spanish 1/2
Mike	Male	Af. Am.	Algebra I	Spanish 1/2
Sasha	Female	Eur. Am.	Geometry	Spanish 3/4
Tiffany	Female	Af. Am.	Pre-Algebra	Not enrolled

Table 2

Focal Students' Activities Before and After School

Student	Before School Activities	After School Activities
Kiana		Occasional babysitting for pay. Homework.
Tiffany	Prepare mother for dialysis 3 times weekly. Dress and feed 8 month old daughter of sister's friend and take the infant to childcare.	Pick up the infant and 2 year old niece from childcare. Baby-sit niece until 9pm when her mother comes to pick her up. Prepare dinner for rest of family (brother, mother, grandparents). Homework, if there is time.
Mike		Baseball or football practice. Homework
Sasha	Crew	Internship with animation studio (unpaid). Homework. Private tutoring sessions for Geometry.
Grant		Computer games. Homework.

Table 3

Students' Talk about Who They Want to Work With in a Small Group

Student	Talk About Who to Work With in a Small Group
Grant	Probably Avi because he always reads and always seems to know what's going on. Jack does a lot of reading as well. He keeps up on it usually. I'm trying to think of other people who constantly read, who do the reading…I often find since they're [quizzes] generally open book, I've done the reading so I generally find that I'm looking through the book while everybody else is socializing.
Kiana	Someone who is intelligent and that also does the work…I would actually probably choose--I'm going to say my friends. Not just because--not just so I could talk to them or whatever. Only because in other experiences I've had...I don't exactly remember...Oh. I don't want to say their names but we sat in a group quiz and they treated me like I was ignorant and when we were reading the questions and I got it right away, they looked at me like "Oh. How do you know that?" I'm like "I read the book." They didn't respect me and my friends do and they know I'm intelligent.
Mike	They'd want to do the work and not play around. I'd avoid people who don't care. Like talk a lot…I try to pick people who I know will do the work and they'll be committed. Then I will too, so it will work real well.
Sasha	I do want people that actually work…I would want someone with a lot of creative ideas because I don't like coming up with it all by myself.… This is what happens with one of the group members in my math class which is that the person just kind of lets us do the work and then copies it and when we ask that person to do it, they just kind of pick up the pencil and write a number 2 and then say "I'm done." They know it's wrong, but as long as they're doing the work. I hate that. Ugh.
Tiffany	…I hate it when people tell me the answer. I just want them to help me find it and then when I find it I'm like "I know how to do it now." Because I feel like I'm not gonna know how to do it later on and they just told me the answer…[She'd pick Terry] She tells us how to find it but she won't tell us the answer. I would pick either Kiana or Christie because they're both smart…Kiana's the kind of person that don't like to mess around. Like I did a thing with Kiana, and she was just like "You have to do this and you have to do that." It was like "Okay."

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